

## T-M Student Heading to Houston

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By Tim Olmeda

A Tuloso-Midway High School student will be heading to Houston to partake in a project sponsored by the National Aeronautical Space Agency.

Junior Kody O'Connell, 16, has been selected to travel in June to Houston to participate in a one-week summer internship at NASA's Johnson Space Center as a result of his involvement with the High School Aerospace Scholars program, which combines distance learning with on-site experiences.

Getting the news Saturday that Kody had been accepted for the internship was a nice surprise for Kody's parents, but the Tuloso-Midway teen said he had a good feeling all along about his chances when he applied.

"I was pretty sure I was going to be selected because of my (program) ranking," Kody said. "It's still pretty cool."

The program, which began in 2000, requires students to submit a copy of their high school transcript, an essay and a letter of recommendation from the applicant's Texas state legislator. Kody was nominated by District 20 state Rep. Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa and was one of 312 Texas high school students picked for the program, said Jessica Cejka, program manager for the High School Aerospace Scholars program.

"The (internship) will last for seven weeks, with about 45 students taking part every week," Cejka said. "Right now, I'd (estimate) that we have about 250 high schools taking part in the program."

Since the aerospace scholars program is sponsored by the state of Texas, only high school students within the state can be nominated.

Kody's father, David, said he and his wife, Katy, are proud their son's hard work is paying off, even if it wasn't always easy.

"We're excited for him. The work he's put into it, I mean, he's sacrificed a lot," David said. "When his friends would call to go to the movies, he'd have a NASA project to do."

Kody said he applied for the program last year after he a counselor showed him a flier saying applications were being accepted. Since NASA had always intrigued the teen, he took the flier home to show his parents.

"I asked my parents, 'What do you think? Do you think I can do this?'" Kody said.

David said his answer to his son's question was pretty simple - go for it.

"We just said, 'You've got to apply,'" David said.

Rhonda Garrett, a counselor at Tuleso-Midway High School, said Kody's accomplishment speaks very highly to the dedication the teen has shown for a field he is passionate about.

"It says a lot for Kody as a student," Garrett said. "Since I've been here, we haven't had a student participate in the program, so it's very cool."

Kody and the other interns now have a monumental task to look forward to - using what they have learned in their online lessons, teams will have to design a feasible manned mission to Mars. At the end of their week on-site, Kody and his fellow team members will present details of their mission to NASA engineers, administrators, astronauts, state legislators, parents, and other officials at the closing luncheon.

To Kody, though, he's just thinking about where this opportunity could lead him later on down the line.

"I think NASA's pretty cool and I'd like to work there someday," Kody said.

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